

VZCZCXRO8228
OO RUEHCI
DE RUEHKA #0586/01 1531055
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 011055Z JUN 08
FM AMEMBASSY DHAKA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6830
INFO RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO PRIORITY 8468
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD PRIORITY 2197
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU PRIORITY 9702
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 0669
RUEHCI/AMCONSUL KOLKATA PRIORITY 1316

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DHAKA 000586

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/28/2018
TAGS: [KDEM](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [BG](#)
SUBJECT: HOME AFFAIRS ADVISER PROMISES HUMAN RIGHTS
SUPPORT, SEEKS U.S. AID FOR DRUGS, PASSPORTS

Classified By: Ambassador James F. Moriarty. Reasons: 1.4 (b) and (d)

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) Home Affairs Adviser Maj. Gen. (retired) M.A. Matin told the Ambassador on 5/28 that Bangladesh was making progress in human rights but could do even better. Matin strongly supported an Embassy request for permission to observe the graft trials of former Prime Ministers Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia to ensure transparency and due process. Matin sought USG assistance in fighting narcotics use and trafficking and in introducing machine-readable passports. He also asked the Ambassador to urge political parties to participate in elections set for December, hinting that a boycott could provoke military rule.

PROMOTING HUMAN RIGHTS AND DUE PROCESS

¶2. (SBU) Home Affairs Adviser Maj. Gen. (retired) M.A. Matin stressed the importance of human rights in two recent meetings with USG officials, the first on 5/20 with visiting Deputy Assistant Secretary for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor Erica Barks-Ruggles and the second on 5/28 with the Ambassador. In both meetings, Matin said he had zero tolerance for extrajudicial killings by law enforcement agencies. He also said he had issued strict instructions that custodial deaths were "absolutely prohibited." In the second meeting, he said the Caretaker Government (CTG) was aware of the Department of State's 2007 Human Rights Report that claimed human rights in Bangladesh had deteriorated under Emergency Power Rules and had "noted the points" it raised. Matin said the Government was considering allowing trade unions to resume their traditional activities, which had been sharply proscribed under Emergency Power Rules in effect since January 2007. He said a proposal for creating a Human Rights Commission was with the Law Adviser for final vetting.

¶3. (SBU) Ambassador Moriarty again requested permission for the Embassy to observe the graft trials of the two former prime ministers, Awami League President Sheikh Hasina and Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) Chairperson Khaleda Zia. Home Affairs Additional Secretary Abdur Rashid cited security and overcrowding in an attempt to discourage Embassy representatives from attending the trials; Matin, however, said an Embassy observer would be "very good for us" because it would put pressure on defense attorneys to stop shouting and otherwise misbehaving in court. He noted that "everything was calm and quiet" last month when Cherie Blair, the wife of former British Prime Minister Tony Blair, visited the courtroom where Sheikh Hasina was on trial. Matin said he would take the Ambassador's request directly to the Law Adviser.

FIGHTING CORRUPTION

14. (SBU) Matin also detailed the ongoing anti-corruption campaign, saying that 59 people, including several high-profile politicians that include former ministers, had been convicted so far with about 50 other cases on trial. He said so far the campaign had netted 197 people. Matin headed the national coordinating committee that helps the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) investigate graft allegations; he explained the CTG had set up five-member cells (each one headed by an army major and including representatives of the ACC, the Special Branch, the National Bureau of Revenue and the police) to investigate the corruption cases. He said the volume of graft cases was so great that the Caretaker Government earlier this month had approved formation of a Truth and Accountability Commission under which corruption suspects could avoid going to prison by surrendering illegally earned wealth. (Note: Political parties have criticized the plan because it would not apply to people, including senior political leaders such as Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia, already jailed on graft charges. End note.)

SEEKING FUNDING AND MORAL SUPPORT FROM THE USG

15. (SBU) Matin told Ambassador Moriarty that Bangladesh needed funding assistance in several areas such as fighting

DHAKA 00000586 002.2 OF 002

narcotics trafficking, developing machine-readable passports and building more prisons. He said use of narcotics was on the rise in Bangladesh and that the vast majority of drug cases were dropped because of limited investigative capability. The Ambassador said the USG should attempt to do more to help Bangladesh and promised to explore additional assistance. Matin noted the International Organization of Migration was assisting Bangladesh in drafting tender documents for creating a machine-readable passport system, a project he estimated would cost 60 million to 80 million euros (\$94 million to \$125 million). The Ambassador said the USG had assisted other countries converting to machine-readable passports and asked the Home Affairs Adviser to provide concrete suggestions for the Embassy to consider. While voicing sympathy for Bangladesh's overcrowded prisons, the Ambassador said the USG did not build jails for other countries.

16. (C) The Home Affairs Adviser reiterated that the Caretaker Government was determined to return Bangladesh to democracy this year but voiced concern that major political parties might not participate in Parliamentary elections scheduled for December unless their jailed leaders are released. Matin urged the Ambassador to influence top politicians not to boycott the vote. He said that in the absence of the Caretaker Government or a civilian political government there "obviously would be a third force to take over," a reference to the military. The Ambassador replied that he worried the political parties could prove intransigent, adding that he was pushing them to compromise.
Moriarty